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# Barbecuing [With] the Common Core

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As the 2016 presidential race revs up, we can expect that the Common Core standards will remain the boogeyman of U.S. education. A mere mention of their name is enough to inspire terror.

But just as our parents once advised, let's check under the bed - because boogeymen have a tendency to feed on more fear than fact.

Support for the Common Core may be mixed, but as one report delicately put it this week, "the broader public's opposition to the Common Core appears to rest on a shallow factual foundation." [That study](#) found that 58% of respondents didn't even know if the standards were being taught in their district. Large chunks of people said they did know - but were wrong.

This study isn't an outlier. My home state [didn't do much better](#) in a poll earlier this year. Other studies have shown many people [don't know which subject areas](#) the standards address.

So, when you're at that Labor Day barbeque and someone challenges the standards (if you work in education, this is almost inevitable), perhaps the first question to ask is: which particular ones do you oppose?

Don't get me wrong, it's certainly fine to oppose the standards broadly. Although the federal government didn't create these standards, its resounding endorsement of them set off alarms for anyone who believes that education policy should be set by the states. That's a great debate for us to have.

But, if we're going to have that debate, we need to come clean about why folks wanted to create common standards in the first place.

Most of us want to work from the assumption that, on the whole, the education received in each state is relatively comparable. A child going to Harvard from Idaho should have roughly the same level of preparation as one hailing from Virginia. That feels fair.

Thing is, it couldn't be further from the truth. As Jill Barshay's [trenchant analysis of NAEP scores](#) suggests, states vary wildly in their expectations of what a student can or should be able to do by the end of each grade. She points out that in 2013, the proficiency bar for the Common-Core aligned eighth-grade literacy test in New York roughly four grade levels higher than that of the un-aligned exam in Georgia.

In the past, state test results told parents that their children were on course, when national tests results suggested otherwise. Dramatically.

When we compare states' claims about proficiency to a common benchmark, the [results are shocking](#). We could call it the expectations gap.

If you're still at that barbeque, you might ask the critic what they'd replace the core standards with. How do they account for the educational performance in their state back in the good old days before the Common Core?

Perhaps, you can politely suggest, this is why states claiming to ditch the core standards [appear to be rebranding](#) them more than anything else.

I feel grateful that we're having a legitimate discussion of the standards. But when this comes up at the barbeque - especially if there are any presidential hopefuls at the grill - I'll be hoping cooler heads prevail than in the past.

Now, if you don't mind, I'm just here for the hot dogs.

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